

Grand Canyon's Canyon View Information Plaza To Open

On October 26, 2000 the National Park Service will open Canyon View Information Plaza, a new state of the art transportation/orientation hub. A ribbon cutting ceremony is planned for 10:00 a.m. at Canyon View Information Plaza just west of Mather Point on the South Rim.

The ceremony is open to the public and will include Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, National Park Service Intermountain Director, Karen Wade, and other special guests.

The Grand Canyon Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to cultivating knowledge, discovery, and stewardship for the benefit of Grand Canyon National Park and its visitors, will also open a new bookstore located on the plaza, and the U.S. Postal Service will join in the celebration by offering a pictorial cancellation commemorating the opening of the plaza.

The opening of this facility represents the first major step in implementing the park's 1995 General Management Plan, a plan that focused on public transportation and enhanced educational and recreational opportunities. Canyon View Information Plaza was designed to fulfill four functions: provide visitors with their first glimpse of the canyon - away from noise and vehicle congestion; introduce visitors to the park's major interpretive themes - enriching the visitors experience; offer visitors a menu of recreational options that include orientation to riding shuttle buses, biking, hiking, and ranger guided activities; and connect visitors to other points in the park with the completion of a mass transit system in early 2004, that will include alternative fuel buses and light rail. The Grand Canyon Greenway, a multi-use trail system will eventually extend from Canyon View Information Plaza to the future Grand Canyon Transit Center north of Tusayan, and to Desert View and Hermits Rest.

The facility is the result of many people and organizations sharing a vision and working together to reach this milestone. It is the first of its kind and scope in a national park - designed to accommodate up to 4,200 people per hour at peak times, the facility will eventually serve as a hub for four modes of transportation; bus, train, biking and hiking. It is also the first major project completed at Grand Canyon with funds from the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, a pilot program approved by Congress in 1996 that allows the national parks and other federal agencies to keep up to 80% of most user fees collected.

The opening of Canyon View Information Plaza is one of the first steps in many to come. Because the facility will open prior to the completion of the mass transit system several changes in traffic patterns will occur to accommodate the visiting public and local community. The National Park Service has already begun to install temporary traffic devices and directional signing that will direct visitors to parking areas within the park. Visitors will be asked to park their vehicle, board a shuttle bus, and visit Canyon View Information Plaza to begin their connection to the Grand Canyon. Once the light rail system is completed, day use visitors will park their cars outside of the park at the Grand Canyon Transit Center and board a light rail train for the short trip to Canyon View Information Plaza.

Beginning with the opening of the Canyon View Information Plaza, the park's shuttle system becomes a year round service. The Village Route, connecting Canyon View to the South Rim Village, will operate from an hour before sunrise to 9:00, 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., depending on the season. The Hermits Rest Route to overlooks on the west rim will operate from an hour before sunrise to an hour after sunset from March through November. The Kaibab Trail Route will operate during the same hours throughout the year. Hermit Road (formally West Rim Drive) and the South Kaibab and Yaki Point Road will be open from December through February.

Although there will be many changes over the next several years, the National Park Service is eager to begin the transition to a new and better way to visit. "We are beginning a new era," stated Acting Park Superintendent, J.T. Reynolds, "we are responding to change in an innovative way that provides greater protection to park resources and a better experience for park visitors. We are transforming the visitor experience at Grand Canyon from one of congestion and limited opportunities to one of greater opportunity!"